

Climbing Notes 2005

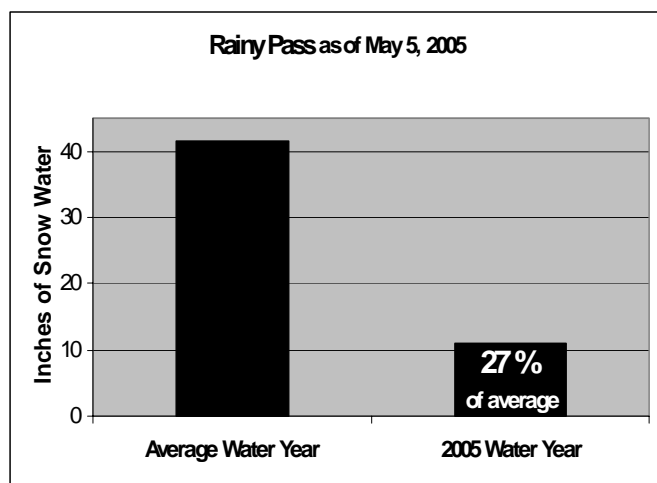
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

North Cascades National Park
Service Complex



Winter 2004-2005: Effects of a Low Snow Year

Whether it's El Nino or global warming, this mild winter and lack of snow will be obvious in the record books and in the North Cascades this summer.



SNOTEL data from one site illustrates the low snowpack.

The winter of 2004 - 2005 was one of the lowest snow years on record since the winter of 1977. North-west climate specialists indicate that the North Cascades range has only 20-30 percent of normal snow pack and 70-80 percent of normal precipitation.

Take One, Leave One Challenge

The ever growing popularity of North Cascades climbs has led to a variety of impacts in the alpine environment. Human waste, flagging, and a multitude of sun-bleached webbing clutter popular climbs with the same frequency as coffee houses in the Pacific Northwest.

During the summer of 2004, rangers on patrol on Mt. Triumph cleaned the popular NE ridge and brought out in excess of 35 pounds of webbing (150 pieces, totaling 600 feet). This large amount of "mountain trash" is an indication of the popularity of the climbing route--and a reminder to revisit the Leave No Trace (LNT) guidelines for alpine climbers.

The official LNT program was launched in 1994, a result of a partnership of multiple land management agencies and outdoor educators. The purpose of LNT is to help wilderness users make good minimum impact decisions while using public lands. After 10 years, LNT has clearly helped reduce impacts in the alpine environment, and it will continue to do so as practices are applied, revised, and handed down to new generations of climbers. One benefit of the LNT program is flexibility: the ability

2004 Search and Rescue Incidents

North Cascades National Park personnel responded to 17 incidents in 2004. The total unprogrammed emergency cost to the National Park Service was \$20,978, of which \$11,685 was for helicopter evacuations. Nine incidents were major SARs involving the evacuation of hiking-related injuries. Four incidents are summarized below:

May 19, 2004

Fall on snow, no protection

A ski mountaineer reported that his partner fell approximately 600 feet from the top of Mount Shuksan. Rangers were flown

Continued on reverse...

Even at elevations as high as 6000 feet, snow accumulation has been abnormal, due to warmer temperatures.

How will this affect the Cascade climber? Many lower elevation roads and trails will be snow free and accessible earlier. Stream fords should be easier with less snowmelt, but glacier crevasses will open early. Expect to see blue ice. Mid - to- late season climbers will encounter greater route finding challenges, and slower travel across scree and boulder fields as the snows vanish. Check with the Wilderness Information Center (360-873-4590 ext. 39) to get the latest information on road, trail, and climbing conditions.

to recognize and deal with newly identified human impacts, such as excessive slings.

The "Take One, Leave One Challenge" is an opportunity for mountaineers to apply simple LNT techniques while climbing. Before placing a sling, ask yourself, "How will this webbing affect the experience of others?" "Does this belay/ rappel station need a new sling?" If you choose to leave a sling, pack out an old one, and replace it with a color that blends with native rock. If you feel you must use flagging, bring it all out with you on your return. An LNT attitude means considering the impact you have on future climbers when you leave "mountain trash" behind. The slight amount of time you contribute now will help keep the "wild" in wilderness for generations to come.



35 pounds of webbing from Triumph

An Anti-Smear Campaign

It's an age old question, but it just won't go away: What to do with human waste on your climbing trip? It's relatively straightforward in forested approaches, where organic soil makes digging a cathole easy and effective. The dilemma comes when you reach the world of rock, snow and ice. Some popular climbing areas have composting toilets, but what to do with poop when there is no toilet?



Bivy site and adjacent smear, Eldorado

There are a number of acceptable human waste disposal methods in the alpine. However, surface disposal (a.k.a. smearing waste on rocks) is not one of them. Although the smear technique was suggested in the past, it does not work well, especially in the Pacific Northwest. High visitation combined with wet Cascade conditions contributes to a too-slow breakdown of harmful pathogens. More importantly, human waste is a water contaminant with serious health risks.



When above tree line, North Cascades National Park asks all climbers to use blue bags wherever composting toilets are not available. Blue bags are free--ask at a ranger station.

The smear captured on camera here was found directly adjacent to a popular bivy site, with great views, near the East Ridge of Eldorado Peak. Don't let human waste contaminate the sites you use and love. Spread the word about the "anti-smear campaign."

Backcountry Reservations on the Horizon

Many a Boston Basin climber has lamented about the nerve-racking wait in the wee hours of the morning to obtain one of the coveted 6 permits for Boston Basin. Well, soon you may be able to sleep in on Friday morning instead of driving early to the ranger station, because you will be able to reserve Boston Basin , Sulphide Glacier, and other backcountry sites


Search and Rescue Incidents

...continued from front

via helicopter to the scene at 8400 feet. Whidby Naval Air Station assisted in winching the injured party into the SAR helicopter for a flight to the hospital. The climber was treated for lumbar, pelvic and left hand fractures and multiple lacerations to his scalp.

June 5, 2004
Poor visibility, no map
A climbing register initiated a search for two brothers overdue from a climb of Mount Shuksan, via the Sulphide Glacier. A team searched the Shannon Ridge and adjacent Swift Creek area by ground and air. Air searchers located the pair in the Swift Creek drainage late in the day. Inclement weather, poor visibility, and lack of maps contributed to the climbers deviating from their route on the descent. The climbers were exhausted, out of food, and soon-to-be cliffed out.

July 31, 2004
Fall on rock, protection failure
A cell phone call from Boston Basin alerted rangers to an accident on the North Ridge of Forbidden. Rangers received a complete report of the location and extent of the injuries via cell phone from the reporting party. The lead climber fell, pulling protection, and sustained open fractures to both legs. Rangers responded via helicopter and delivered a radio by long line to the fallen climber. The injured climber was interviewed about his current medical condition and informed that due to impending sunset, rescue would take place the following morning. The next day a rescue was initiated via helicopter. Rangers packaged the patient in a litter and short-hauled him to an upper staging area. The patient was transferred to a larger helicopter and flown to Concrete Airport, then transferred to a third helicopter, Airlift Northwest, for transport to Harborview Medical Center.



Rangers with the patient at the upper staging area, Forbidden

August 21, 2004
Poor weather, late turn-around time, impending darkness
Sudden inclement weather and poor visibility stranded a group of four climbers at the 7000 foot level on the Sulphide Glacier, Mt. Shuksan. The party leader called for help using his cell phone, and provided information on the group's condition and approximate location. Rangers in the area were unable to reach the group that night, and instructed the party to spend the night. At dawn the next day, rangers and a local volunteer SAR team began a search at the reported location. The team found the group and assisted them off the glacier to the trailhead. One member was suffering from mild hypothermia and exhaustion.

well in advance. Park staff are working with Mount Rainier and Olympic National Parks to craft a user-fee- supported permit and reservation system that will be similar between the three parks and allow North Cascades visitors the opportunity to reserve sites in advance for the first time in a decade. Look for opportunities for public comment in fall 2005, with changes potentially taking place in 2006.